

arches



Persevere.

"I lost my pride to these mountains, and in exchange for repeatedly being humbled I was freed."

—Linsey Warren '09, the youngest person to climb Washington's 100 highest peaks



Five years. 100 peaks.

Talk about “To the Heights”: Linsey Warren ‘09 is highest mountains in Washington—a laudable feat. An enduring takeaway is what you learn about yours

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PHOTOS BY LUKE HUMPHREY



Linsey on top of Mount Buckner (9,114 feet), carefully looking for the summit register.
(Which turned out to be a plastic peanut butter jar.)

the youngest person to have climbed the 100 at, of course, but with any epic adventure the elf and the store of resolve that you acquire.



“Day or night makes no difference when trying to climb the 100 peaks. You must be prepared to climb at all times and in all conditions,” says Linsey. This otherworldly photo was taken on the Coleman Glacier, Mount Baker.

In July 2009, just months after graduating from Puget Sound, I found myself on a Mountaineers Club climb of Argonaut Peak. Being a Mountaineers climb it was reasonable to expect a wide range of skills and sanity levels. But then sanity can come into question on any climbing trip: What sane person thinks it’s fun to slog long, arduous hours, often in the dark; in thin, blustery, cold air; sleeping fitfully on rock or snow; and all with the knowledge that somewhere along the way you’ll be in a situation where one poorly placed foot could send you on a long, fast, unpleasant descent?

But I have to admit that *is* one of my ideas of fun, and it therefore did not seem outrageous when a grizzled old gentleman began talking about “The List”—the Bulger

List, the 100 highest peaks in Washington state, all of which are more than 8,300 feet high—and I began to think that climbing all of the mountains on the list sounded quite doable.

I mean, I already had climbed seven of the peaks, which by my reckoning was close to 10 peaks, which was one-tenth of the way done. And since it hadn’t been all that hard to reach one-tenth of the summits, how hard could the remaining nine-tenths be?

As it turned out, a lot harder than I’d anticipated.

Excitement and passion create adventure. Tenacity and perseverance keep it alive. And unglamorous everyday moments define it. For me, that definition came in all forms. On

the summit of Buckner it was as innocuous as a hair tie becoming so tangled and lost in my windswept, matted hair that my male climbing partner had to help me find and extricate it. A little later, after having walked for nearly 20 straight hours, we stopped for water and food only to fall dead asleep in the dirt, the salami and crackers we had been eating still in our laps.

Unglamorous is being so cold that on Tupshin and Devore another person and I stuffed ourselves into a bivy sack, which was so tight neither of us could move. On Cathedral and Amphitheater my feet blistered. I was ripping strips of duct tape off a small roll to wrap the sores, but I tore off too much and put the extra between my lips to hold, and when I pulled it away skin came with



“Even though I spend most trips as ‘one of the guys,’ some days it’s nice to show that I am a climber but also a lady. And a lady can summit Mount Baker (10,781 feet), have a beer for breakfast, and still have time to dress up for a photo shoot.”

it, followed by blood. On Cannon my partner’s boots froze so solid we had to put them directly on the burner of our stove and melt them enough to get his feet in.

These little trials were compounded by equally unglamorous but larger internal struggles, and after months of discomfort, pain, and setbacks, my spirit diminished. On Rahm, the 52nd peak I summited, I wrote on a laminated piece of paper I carry with me, “Seriously reconsidering this 100 highest thing”—a raw and powerful memory. Just two days before that, a combination of overconfidence and impatience led me to a crumbling section of cliff that I was unable to back down from safely. I was forced to climb upward—unroped—and a rock broke free, which knocked my leg off the route

and caused the section I was on to collapse around me. I am still not sure how, but I hung on by the tips of my fingers and two crampon points. Realizing what it had taken to get me just halfway to the 100 was stark and self-awakening, and the understanding of what was still to come had started to dawn.

Three years have passed since that realization. In the meantime I’ve survived a thunderstorm under a small tarp just below the summit of Pinnacle, dived backward in self-arrest when a partner punched into a crevasse on Glacier Peak, and helped rescue a critically injured two-man party on the classic West Ridge of Forbidden. Just this year I got off route and climbed a spire north of the true summit of Logan, when the rope ran out. I found myself on a wet, vertical section

of rock with no safe way to retreat. I yelled for more rope. I needed just an agonizing 3 feet to reach a safer place. As my arms shook from the effort to hold on, it began to snow. Then my partner cried, “Falling!” and I heard the sound of rocks breaking free. I braced for an impact that would pull me off the face, but it never came. After several heart-pounding minutes of yelling my partner’s name into silence, I got back a muted “I’m still here!” So, yes, there were a lot of innocuous challenges and mishaps, but I also experienced my fair share of adrenaline.

Truth be told, though, I lost my pride to these mountains. And freed from the expectation that a trip was going to go well, or that I was in control of a situation, I learned to



“There’s nothing quite like being the only people on a mountain, squeezed into a tiny tent under a vivid starscape. From here we made an alpine start at four in the morning, climbing in our own winter wonderland all the way to the summit of Fernow (9,249 feet).”

not only expect but embrace the long hours. I learned to laugh where others might have cursed, and I relished a deeper connection with the mountains around me. I grew to respect their strength and beauty, characteristics that in time seemed to take on human qualities, and as one entity to another I felt a soulful connection to them. Like reading a person, I learned to read the landscape and how to negotiate difficult terrain without incident.

The environment was a constant and wonderful juxtaposition as I ventured farther and deeper into remote parts of the Cascade Mountains. Just getting to the peaks took me through everything from the lush, green carpets of moss around Storm King, to the rocky and barren landscapes of Carru and Lago, to the thick forests and alpine meadows of Star,

and onto the expansive glaciers around Eldorado and Klawatti. Lost in a world of beauty, I found it easier to displace hardship.

Then, too, I learned to indulge in man-made moments of levity that offset the physical difficulty of the journey. On Mount Baker we climbed past midnight through the broken-up crevasses, laughing like wonder-struck children at the light show created by our headlamps on the ice. On Maude I watched the sun set red, with a plastic bottle of white wine in my hand. On the summit of Glacier Peak the whole party stripped and concocted costumes from our climbing gear: Two helmets made a “coconut” bra, and a harness full of dangling carabiners and ice screws made a lovely hula skirt for me. Once more on Mount Baker, I climbed in a red cocktail

dress. While I walked between crevasses and hung from ice blocks, I heard an astonished climber yell from ‘round a corner, “There’s someone in a dress up there! No, seriously! Someone is in a dress!”

I can only imagine that, upon seeing me, their rope team thought they were hallucinating due to altitude sickness, fatigue, or a combination thereof.

And so it went: Five years of pain, euphoria, exhaustion, and smiles. On Sept. 27, 2014, after more than half a million vertical feet of gain, I ascended Windy and became the 49th person, ninth woman, and youngest person ever to complete the Bulger List.

Was it crazy? Sure. Crazy challenging. Crazy satisfying. Crazy inspiring. Crazy fun. 🏔️



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Luke Humphrey is a climber who's been photographing alpine landscapes in the Pacific Northwest for more than five years. He originally began in fashion/portrait photography but shifted his focus to higher altitudes following an inspiring 2009 Mount Rainier ascent. He's since climbed Rainier 10 times, with three ski snowboard descents (two solo), climbed Denali in Alaska, Kilimanjaro in Africa, and dozens of peaks in Washington, including the 10 highest (with the exception of Goode Mountain).

Success! Sept. 27, 2014: Linsey on the summit of Windy Peak (8,333 feet), in the Pasayten Wilderness in the far northeast part of the Washington Cascades, about 5 miles south of the Canadian border.

